



MARAD Update



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Smithsonian's Maritime Exhibit to Get Major Facelift

Story and Photo by Thom Robinson
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Officials at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in the District of Columbia have announced plans for a new exhibit called "On the Water: Stories from Maritime America." The new exhibit will deliver the key message that maritime activity was critical in American history and is still essential today.

The exhibit's theme parallels the Maritime Administration's mission to promote the nation's maritime industry. In keeping with this role, MARAD is assisting the exhibit by donating maritime artifacts.

Former Maritime Administrator retired Navy Vice Adm. Albert J. Herberger is chairing a committee to help and to coordinate fundraising efforts.

"The quality of exhibits at the National Museum of American History is always outstanding," said Herberger, "and they get four or five million people through there every year. It's a wonderful way to raise the visibility of the entire maritime industry."

Paula Johnson, project director and curator of "On the Water," is enthusiastic about the new project, but also eager to get the plans and designs off the drawing boards and onto the museum floor. She says what's needed at this point are concerned corporate sponsors.

Ms. Johnson explained that most Americans simply don't realize the important role the maritime industry plays in their daily lives. This new exhibit is an ambitious public education project that will use art, artifacts, written and oral history, multimedia and new media to engage audiences both young and old in the nation's maritime history and culture.

"Everyone is dependent on the mariners, but it seems that (the public) never thinks about it," said Ms. Johnson. "And that's our story: If maritime commerce ended tomorrow, you'd know it immediately."

"On the Water" will tell that story to visitors as they walk through the chronologically organized exhibit, which begins with the "Atlantic World" section, then comes the "Maritime Nation" section, "Fishing for a Living," "Inland Waterways," "Ocean Crossings" and "Answering the Call During War-time." The exhibit will conclude with a "Modern Maritime America" section.

Adm. Herberger added: "Once opened, "On the Water" is expected to be on display for 20 years, and will teach millions of visitors about the maritime industry and America's maritime heritage."



A giant propeller, salvaged from the old commercial ship Indiana, which sank in 1858, is on display now at the National Museum of American History and will also be part of the new maritime exhibit, "On the Water," which is scheduled to open in 2008.